

Board of Visitors Constituency Report
Leslie Orellana, Undergraduate Representative
March 24th - 25th, 2025

Good morning, Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today regarding undergraduate students. This semester has truly flown by, and I am excited to share some exciting updates.

First, the Undergraduate Student Senate and I have been working in collaboration with Facilities and the Virginia Tech Police Department to address pedestrian safety. When first thinking of this issue, we thought of the increased risk students may have at crosswalks at night when visibility is limited. We then communicated our concern and worked with Facilities to understand what projects would be most impactful and could also be supported through the student senate's internal funding. To mitigate the risk of walking on campus at night, we proposed to install a solar powered blinking crosswalk sign to an existing crosswalk location on campus. The Undergraduate Student Senate analyzed data provided by the Virginia Tech Police Department and insight from students to create an internal vote on the location of the blinking crosswalk sign. And with that, I am very happy to report that a resolution to install this sign at the crosswalk between Kent Street and Owens Access Drive was approved by the Senate this past Tuesday. We are excited to see this impactful change on campus as Facilities begins their work by the end of the semester. This has been an incredible opportunity to learn from each other and work together for the safety and advancement of Virginia Tech for all Hokies.

As I have only about 50 days left until graduation, I have had the privilege to reflect on my 5 years here at Virginia Tech. Throughout that time, I have had the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone - majoring in subject matter I didn't even know existed, and grow professionally, academically, and personally. But most importantly, I have made Virginia Tech my forever "home". I think back to my freshman year self of being a first-generation student scared of a lot of things that came with being in this new environment. I have learned to lean on the community I have built to guide me throughout my time. My community taught me to be curious and celebrate how each student brings unique perspectives and experiences to the table - something I will carry with me long after I graduate. This semester has brought on a series of uncertainties that have left many students worried, nervous, and isolated. But it is also in times like these that have shown me the strength of Ut Prosim and the hope of Hokie Nation. I have learned that

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sharing my experiences and background, while also listening to others share their stories, creates empowerment and a celebration of our growth as students. Last week, we celebrated Principles of Community week, and it served as a reminder of the values we hold together to create a community that nurtures learning and growth. I hope that we continue to strive to make Virginia Tech home for all, as it is for me and many of you.

At November's meeting, I spoke about the challenges students are facing regarding career fairs and finding quality experiential learning opportunities. I am excited to provide an update on our progress to understand how to best support students and provide them with the resources they may need as they explore opportunities. I have been working with Career and Professional Development services to create a survey for students and employers to share their Virginia Tech career fairs experiences. With no set standardization on how a career fair should be conducted whether it be within a college, major, or broader scale; students are left to navigate the confusing world of seeking opportunities with little guidance. This survey will serve as a starting point to understand the current landscape as we continue the work to provide accessible and quality resources and experiential learning opportunities to all students and soon-to-be graduates.

Once again, thank you all for all the opportunity to share about the undergraduate student experience. I am grateful for all the support and collaboration I have received from administrators and other departments. The progress we have made in the advancement of Virginia Tech is incredible and I am excited to continue the good work and share my progress at the June meeting. Thank you for your continued efforts to make Virginia Tech home for all and Go Hokies!

Graduate & Professional Student Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

March 24 – 25, 2025

Presented by William Poland, Graduate & Professional Student Representative

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, EVP Sebring, administrators, and guests. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you all about the graduate and professional students today.

First, I'd like to start by providing a couple brief updates on recent efforts aimed at supporting graduate student resources: (1) In February I worked with the Graduate School and the Graduate and Professional Student Senate to host our 2nd Spring Resource Fair. This event was aimed at graduate students starting this spring semester and brought together over two dozen resources and services from across the university. (2) Last month I also had a second meeting with Advancement's Communications and Marketing team, where I presented a set of recommendations to update the "vt.edu/resources" websites. Graduate Student Services helped me to gather the most up to date information so that this website can more accurately reflect all of the services that Virginia Tech offers to its graduate students.

I'd also like to mention a few updates on the university governance side of things. (1) Following approval of a Graduate and Professional Student Senate resolution, a working group will be forming soon to examine issues of academic bullying and unprofessional behaviors impacting graduate students. This working group will examine current processes and procedures for handling such issues in an effort to unify and streamline them. (2) I am excited about the new university mission initiative that has been approved to review doctoral students' research, costs, and compensation. Both of these are good efforts in continuing to improve and enhance the graduate and professional student experience at Virginia Tech. (3) I would like to briefly mention some of the points made during the tuition and fees public comment session a couple of weeks ago. While I understand that inflation and funding changes from the state make some cost increases unavoidable, I urge the board to try and keep tuition and fees as low as possible. Many graduate students who do not have assistantships have to pay their own tuition without any financial support, and even students on assistantships do not normally have all fees, such as the comprehensive fee, covered. Especially in the current climate, our graduate and professional students are facing many challenges and hardships, so we should try to reduce extra financial burdens on them as much as possible.

Now, speaking of challenges and hardships -- I'd like to address the impacts from recent changes from the federal administration. As I'm sure you're all aware, recent guidance from the Department of Education, as well as funding uncertainty from sources like NIH and NSF have significantly impacted our university, including the work of our graduate and professional students. Additionally, anticipated changes in immigration policies, such as potential travel bans as well as delays and denials in visa reviews, have placed additional worries on our international student population.

I do not wish to debate these policies, but I feel it is my duty to address how our graduate and professional students are being impacted by this situation. In conversations with students, many feel stress, anxiety, worry, fear, and above all else uncertainty about what is to come in the future. Issues on student's minds include loss of grant funding, worries over visa status, and an increasingly difficult job market after graduation. Many students also feel concern for those around them, whether it be colleagues, fellow students, friends, or family that have been affected as well. In student's minds is also the question of how these changes will impact Virginia Tech as a university, and if it will continue to stay the same welcoming community that they have known through their time here.

Fundings freezes have impacted the extraordinary research that our graduate students are working on, particularly in areas such as healthcare, energy, and the environment. Combined with changes in immigration policies and university restructuring impacting the Virginia Tech community, recruitment and retention will certainly be impacted. Current and future students may begin to wonder if opportunities in higher education remain as attractive and stable as previously thought, and if future opportunities will even continue to exist in their research area.

I bring these points up to illustrate how this is a time of increased stress and uncertainty that is impacting academic life, research life, and overall student well-being. There are no simple answers or easy solutions to these problems, and I know that university administration has been working very hard to address these recent changes. Still, it is paramount that we prioritize transparency, two-way communication, support, and care for our graduate and professional students through this time – especially as we try to maintain a competitive advantage over other universities facing the same challenges.

Now, I would like to end on a more uplifting note. As many members of the Board already know, last week concluded the search process for the next Board of Visitors student representatives who will start their terms in July. After reviewing all the applications and sitting in on the interviews, I am very pleased with the talented pool of candidates who applied for these roles. Virginia Tech continues to attract exceptional students who have a strong desire to serve and give back to their university – and I find this both encouraging and something to be proud of as we approach the end of this academic year and begin planning for the next one.

Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

March 24-25, 2025 Presented by LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Senate President

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Amy Sebring, administrators, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech.

In today's report, I will highlight key initiatives, recent accomplishments, and ongoing efforts aimed at improving staff and non-student wage welfare and strengthening our collective impact. From new focus working groups to community-building activities, our efforts reflect the shared commitment to fostering a workplace where every staff and non-student wage member can thrive.

In my November report, I mentioned that the Compensation Task Force would be meeting soon. I'm pleased to inform you that the task force has begun its work, and in our review of compensation, we are also taking a comprehensive look at benefits as part of the overall package. We understand that both compensation and benefits are integral to supporting the well-being of our staff. In our kick-off meeting, we were joined by the Compensation Team from the Division of Human Resources, who provided us with an insightful overview of their compensation review practices. This collaboration has been invaluable as we move forward with evaluating and enhancing our compensation structure.

It's important to note that as of this year, the monthly insurance premium for an employee on a family plan (employee plus two or more dependents) is now \$522.00. This is an increase from \$476.00 in 2021, and for many staff members, it has become increasingly difficult to manage the rising costs of healthcare while balancing other financial obligations. The merit process while appreciated falls short of meaningful impact for many of our staff employees.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight the upcoming James D. McComas Staff Leadership Conference, which provides a valuable opportunity for staff to engage in professional development, network with colleagues, and enhance their leadership skills.

The McComas Staff Leadership Conference is designed to bring together staff from various departments and positions within the organization to participate in workshops, keynote presentations, and interactive sessions. The goal of the conference is to empower staff with the tools, knowledge, and connections needed to strengthen leadership capabilities and foster a positive and productive workplace culture.

This year, the conference will focus on Governance at Virginia Tech. It's an exciting opportunity for staff to learn, grow, and contribute to the overall mission and success of our organization.

Staff Senate elections are coming soon. This is an important opportunity for staff to have a voice in shaping the direction of our organization. The elections provide a chance for new leadership to emerge, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives to the table.

The Staff Senate plays a critical role in advocating for the needs and interests of all staff and non-student wage members, and their involvement can help ensure that we continue to make progress.

In closing, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the **Board members, administrators**, and all members of the **Virginia Tech community**. Your dedication, support, and commitment to making Virginia Tech a better place for all of us are truly appreciated.

Together, we continue to work towards a future where every employee feels valued and supported. I am proud to be a part of this community, and I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with all of you in our shared mission.

Thank you once again for all that you do.

Go Hokies!

LaTawnya Burleson

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report

March 24-25, 2025

Presented by Janice Austin, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good morning, Rector Baine, board members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President Sebring, administrators, and guests. It is a pleasure to be with you all for the March board meeting.

As Hokies and in the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, we give to the things we care about. I am pleased to share that during Give Day in February, A/P faculty donated nearly \$3,000 to our philanthropic project, The Market of Virginia Tech. This amount will feed 600 Hokies for one day, or 85 for a week. It will have a significant impact for these Hokies and is a way A/P Faculty are able to show our students how much we care for them. Yet our effort continues as we still aim to have broader participation from A/P Faculty and are continuing this philanthropic effort through the end of June.

The A/P Faculty Senate wholeheartedly joined the other employee and student senates on March 5th in recognizing the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Virginia Tech Principles of Community and reaffirming our commitment to these aspirations and values. Additionally, I joined representatives from the other senates in reading the Principles of Community during the 20 Years of the Principles of Community celebration event held in the Holtzman Alumni Center last Friday. I thank the Faculty Senate for their leadership in the reaffirmation and all the senates for our collective voice emphasizing our continued commitment to, and support of, the Principles of Community.

The AP Faculty employee group is comprised of over 2,400 individuals doing a great diversity of work in support of the university's strategic initiatives. Today I would like to highlight some of the work done by AP faculty members in Student Affairs. The work of AP faculty in Student Affairs ensures each student is able to get the fullest Virginia Tech experience possible. From the time they step onto campus as a new student through celebrating at commencement and all the connection points in between, A/P Faculty work tirelessly to offer high quality programs and support resources so that every student Hokie feels part of the broader Virginia Tech community and can be successful in their educational endeavors. Under the leadership of Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Frances Keene, A/P faculty in Student Affairs have responsibilities as directors, coordinators, clinicians, and more in Cranwell International Center, Student Conduct, Online Learning Partnerships, the VT Corps of Cadets, Housing, Dining Services, Hokie Wellness, Recreational Sports, Schiffert Health Center, Cook Counseling Center, among many others. While students are

obtaining a first-class education here at Virginia Tech, A/P Faculty in Student Affairs are helping to ensure their success in all aspects of student life outside the classroom as well. Many of these colleagues are here today and I thank them for their dedication to our students. I will share more about our two remaining constituent areas during the June meeting.

I would be remiss to not share two illustrations of the increasing myriad of concerns among A/P Faculty within the recent months around the current national climate and the impacts on higher education, our work here at Virginia Tech, offices and programs, individual employees, as well as students and their families. The stop-work orders and loss of research funding have already, and are likely to continue to, affect the work of some A/P faculty, our campus faculty and staff colleagues, and our students. Additional potential funding restrictions adds to uncertainty for and unease about the immediate future. This type of unpredictable environment does not lend itself to focus, productivity, or high morale. It is critical that those experiencing the deep effects of these restrictions are provided the upmost support and care from our entire community.

Divisive rhetoric we are experiencing is in direct opposition to our Principles of Community and the decades of work by many Hokies that has gone into creating the Virginia Tech community we all enjoy today where each person is valued, supported, and may express themselves freely in a climate of civility and mutual respect. Further, A/P faculty are deeply concerned with any rhetoric that misrepresents and mischaracterizes our work as illegal or immoral. We collectively must continue to acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity. And we must not waver in our affirmation that Virginia Tech values human diversity because it enriches our lives and the university.

Our university community has experienced difficulty, tragedy, and uncertain times before yet emerged stronger as a community so we have the capacity to do so now as well. We are fortunate to have senior leadership that is actively focused on the federal actions and supporting all in our community who are experiencing varying impacts. On behalf of A/P faculty, I thank our senior leaders for their steadfast attention to guiding the university through this time, offering opportunities to all campus members to voice our concerns, ensuring support resources are readily available, and for providing clarity when it is known. We know how to come together as Hokies, dedicated to our shared values and aspirations in the Principles of Community, united in support of one another and remaining the community of *Ut Prosim* that welcomes, values, and cares for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today and I look forward to updating you again at the June meeting.

March 2025 Faculty Senate Constituency Report

Rachel Miles, Faculty Senate President

Good morning members of the Board, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Chief Operating Officer Amy Sebring, administrators, and guests. Thank you for your time and attention today.

In 2005, the university and the Board of Visitors collaboratively authored the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. In celebration of its twentieth anniversary, the five Senates at Virginia Tech recently reaffirmed their commitment to these Principles. As we navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world, upholding these values is more essential than ever. The Principles of Community describe the identity of our Virginia Tech community as a welcoming and supporting place for all. The faculty of Virginia Tech don't just affirm these principles—we embrace, celebrate, and live them. These shared values are at the core of who we are and what we do as we support our students, our colleagues, and the mission of the university.

Faculty have pressing questions about the future of Virginia Tech. Chief among them is whether the Board of Visitors and university leadership will actively uphold the Principles of Community—not just in spirit, but as a guiding force for decision-making. Amid growing pressures on higher education—both perceived and real—faculty look to the Board to reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom and the vital protections of tenure. These are not abstract ideals; they are essential to Virginia Tech's ability to serve its students, foster innovation, and thrive.

We live in volatile times, and this uncertainty makes many uneasy. Faculty are no exception. We recognize that university leaders may not always have immediate or definitive answers to pressing questions. However, it is essential for the Board and university leadership to remain steadfast in upholding the Principles of Community and ensuring that freedom of expression and academic freedom continue to guide decision-making. While the future remains uncertain, we can take proactive steps to prepare for what lies ahead. As a university community, we must unite to establish clear messaging, effective communication channels, and strong leadership that values shared governance to navigate the path forward together.

At the same time, we acknowledge the necessity of complying with laws as a fundamental tenet of serving the public interest and maintaining and building public trust. However, legal frameworks are often open to interpretation and subject to challenge. This complexity demands thoughtful, transparent, and adaptive leadership that carefully balances legal obligations with the university's commitment to fostering a fair and supportive academic environment for all.

Equally important is our duty to uphold our land-grant mission, which for over 150 years has defined Virginia Tech as a community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the world. Embodied in our motto, *Ut Prosim (That I May Serve)*, these words are both literally and figuratively etched into the limestone walls of our buildings. They remind us of our shared responsibility to one another and our pursuit of common goals. Fundamental to this mission is academic freedom—the ability to engage in scholarship and teaching without interference. This freedom, safeguarded by tenure, is what allows Virginia Tech to prepare the

leaders of tomorrow. A commitment to both academic freedom and legal compliance is essential to fulfilling our land-grant mission.

Now more than ever, collaboration, transparency, and shared governance are critical. We are grateful for the communications and transparency from the university administration thus far, and we hope we can continue to build our trust in one another. We must remember who we are and what we stand for. By fostering mutual respect, we can create stability amidst uncertainty, reinforcing what makes the Hokie Nation great. This respect calls for open communication, genuine engagement, and patience as we work together to uphold our shared values.

Let me close with this. In moments of challenge, we return to Nikki Giovanni's words: "The Hokie Nation embraces our own and reaches out with open hearts and hands to those who offer their hearts and minds," reminding us of the strength and unity that define our community. No matter the obstacles we face, there is nothing we cannot accomplish—nothing we cannot overcome—if we listen to one another and work together. Professor Giovanni concluded, so emotionally, so fearlessly, so hopefully: "We will prevail! We *will* prevail! We will *prevail*! We are Virginia Tech."